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SUBJECT: DRC NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR GREAT LAKES CONFERENCE
UPDATE

1. (U) Summary. The DRC's National Coordinator for the Great Lakes Conference (GLC) states that initial contacts with civil society groups around the country show that the top priority for most people is peace and security. Congolese citizens have expressed serious concerns about territorial integrity and the insecurity posed by armed groups and unpaid soldiers. The DRC is preparing to participate at an upcoming regional meeting of national coordinators to the GLC in Bujumbura September 6-10, in which members will discuss national priorities and the GLC's proposed agenda. End Summary.

National Committee Working on DRC's Agenda

2. (U) Poloff met with the DRC's National Coordinator for the GLC, Baudouin Hamuli, September 1st, to discuss preparations for this regional event currently scheduled for mid-November 2004. The four major themes that the GLC is planning to address are peace and security, good governance and democracy, economic development and regional integration, and humanitarian and social questions. The United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, Canada and The Netherlands are supporting this event and will be sending observers to the conference.

3. (U) According to Hamuli, the DRC's national commission has been working with civil society groups from around the country to get their input on what ought to be the priorities for the Congo at the GLC. Although their work is ongoing, the current consensus is that the country should focus on peace and security issues. Ensuring the country's territorial integrity and preventing a conflict with Rwanda is the top security concern. Two other important security concerns expressed are addressing the problem of armed groups in Ituri and the Kivus, as well as the threats posed by unpaid soldiers and the lack of a unified national army.

DRC to Participate at Upcoming Regional Meeting in Bujumbura

4. (U) Hamuli indicated that the DRC will attend the upcoming meeting of national coordinators for the GLC in Bujumbura, September 6-10. This will be the first regional meeting in which each participating country will discuss its national priorities with the goal of formulating a common agenda for the conference. Hamuli noted that although the DRC had not yet reached a consensus about its national agenda, it was nonetheless prepared to discuss its preliminary findings. He hopes that the DRC will be able to present its final agenda by the next regional meeting, scheduled to take place in Kinshasa in October.

5. (U) Hamuli explained that the current core members for the GLC include Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and the DRC. He said that all core members except Rwanda and Uganda had also agreed to include Angola and the Republic of Congo as additional core members. The Netherlands and Canada are the principal financial sponsors of this regional event. Although Hamuli expressed a desire for greater U.S. support for the conference, poloff reiterated post's previously stated concerns over the vast scope of this conference and the lack of a concise agenda.

Comment

6. (U) Although the concept of a regional Great Lakes conference to deal with peace, security, and economic development issues is a positive initiative, legitimate concerns remain over the wide range of topics the forum seeks to cover. As suggested by initial feedback from civil society groups, peace and security remain the main concerns for the Congolese. The DRC should attempt to use the limited time left before the scheduled November GLC to focus on concrete and realistic goals that can help improve national and regional security.

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